

VZCZCXRO1818
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLG #0802/01 3020856
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 290856Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4739
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 6709
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI 0004

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000802

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DEPT FOR PRM - MARY LANGE, AF/S - ELIZABETH PELLATREAU

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MALAWI: RWANDAN REFUGEES UNDER THREAT, OR
MISINFORMATION

11. (SBU) Summary: Since the September visit of Rwandan President Paul Kagame to Malawi, a press report and letters from Rwandan refugees claim that the government of Rwanda (GOR) has made threats against the lives of refugees currently in Malawi. While Rwandan overseas opposition parties have used the situation to condemn Kagame and the current government, the GOR is seeking to begin tripartite talks with the government of Malawi (GOM) and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) about the repatriation of the 4000 Rwandan refugees in Malawi. The GOM is a willing participant due to both refugee fatigue and increasing complaints about Rwandan refugees successfully competing against local businesses. While no threats of violence against Rwandan refugees in Malawi could be verified, the refugees have a legitimate fear that intergovernmental negotiations may leave them with the limited choice of repatriation or fleeing again. End Summary.

Overseas Opposition Parties Seize Attack as Opportunity

12. (SBU) On October 9, a Rwandan opposition party coalition called UDF-Inkingi put out a press release alleging that Dr. Jean Marie Vianney Rwabukwisi, a Rwandan refugee in Lilongwe, was attacked in his home by several undercover Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) intelligence operatives. Since Rwabukwisi is a physician, he is allowed to live and work outside of the refugee camp and has been working in a clinic in Lilongwe for eight years. Emboff discussed the attack with Rwabukwisi who confirmed that one or two shots were fired into his home on October 1 while he was out of the house. He stated that his wife and son were at home at the time of the shots, but were unharmed. Countering claims in the press release of multiple men entering the house and destroying belongings, Malawi police reports and Rwabukwisi's own statements show no one entered the house. It is believed the shots were fired from outside a security wall surrounding his home. Police, while still investigating, have no leads or suspects. Rwabukwisi has been in Lilongwe since 1998 and is a Malawi permanent resident with no plans to return to Rwanda. He claimed no political affiliations or motivation and stated that outside of interactions with Rwandan patients from the refugee camp who sought him out due to language difficulties, he had little interaction with other refugees. Rwabukwisi, while fearful of another attack and while not entirely ruling out Rwandan involvement in the first attack, said UDF-Inkingi is just using his misfortune to promote its own agenda.

Kagame Visit Triggers Rwandan Refugee Response

13. (SBU) Since the three-day visit of Rwandan President Paul Kagame to Malawi in early September, Rwandan refugees at the Dzaleka refugee camp have written letters to UNHCR and several embassies claiming harassment and threats from RPF officials. During his visit, Kagame was scheduled to meet with a group of refugees to discuss their concerns about returning to Rwanda. Before the meeting, the group of refugees presented a list of concerns in writing including anti-Hutu bias in the Gacaca courts, the lack of a Hutu day of mourning, differing levels of assistance to Hutu widows and orphans, and inequitable distribution of land to returning refugees. While the list was presented to the Rwandan delegation, the planned meeting with President Kagame never occurred.

14. (SBU) Rwandan refugees make up approximately 40% of Malawi's approximately 10,000 person refugee population. As of August 31, 3581 Rwandans lived in refugee camps while an estimated 1000 more have moved into various cities and villages in the country. Lilian Ng'oma, GOM Commissioner for Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs who oversees refugee issues in Malawi, told Emboff that the GOR has tried to encourage refugees to return voluntarily to Rwanda, but the refugee population will not trust the GOR. Of the few who have attempted to return voluntarily, most have come back to the refugee camp and encouraged the rest to not attempt a return. The GOM is battling increasing displeasure from locals who claim Rwandan refugees are opening stores and undercutting local businesses. Ng'oma stated Rwandans are often better capitalized because they sold their possessions before leaving Rwanda and had cash to invest. A UNHCR staff member admitted to Emboff that Rwandan refugees at the camp were able to grow cash crops instead of staples since they were provided food rations and that some had formed co-operatives and sold tomatoes, onions, and potatoes to

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local restaurants and hotels. Ng'oma confirmed that the GOM and GOR both sought to begin tripartite talks including UNHCR on the possible repatriation of Rwandan refugees but, both Ng'oma and UNHCR expressed pessimism given current levels of distrust between the refugees and GOR. To help facilitate a possible repatriation, Commissioner Ng'oma said the GOM will propose that the GOR send down former refugees from Tanzania and Uganda to discuss current conditions in Rwanda, rather than GOR representatives.

Xenophobia and Political Agendas Abound

15. (SBU) Comment: Malawians, who were willing hosts to over 1 million Mozambican refugees in the 1990s and are currently very tolerant of Zimbabweans mixing into the local population, clearly have a separate standard for non-neighbors. Over 90% of refugees in camps in Malawi are from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and these refugees are viewed as outsiders. Complaints abound from both private and public sources about the need to close loopholes in the laws that let Rwandan refugees compete against local Malawians in business. Moreover, the GOM appears willing to accept the GOR's statements about current conditions in Rwanda at face value if it can help lead to the repatriation of over 4000 refugees from Malawi. The refugee camps undoubtedly are fertile fields for opposition parties to sow their version of information about the current situation in Rwanda. As seen with Dr. Rwabukwisi story, the opposition versions can be fraught with misinformation. Still, all Rwandan refugees in Malawi are fearful of forced return if there is an agreement between the GOM and the GOR.

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